524
B88
Copy 1

CHRISTIANITY AND THE PRESENT WORLD SITUATION

The First Annual Address before the Scholarship Society of Southwestern University at Georgetown, delivered on June 10th, 1916.

- BY -

GEORGE CHARLES BUTTE, M. A., J. U. D.

Associate Professor of Law in the University of Texas

AUSTIN 1916

T524
.B88

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Christianity has failed! Civilization is bankrupt! The present world organization is inadequate! The human race has fallen over a precipice and lies in the abyss of despair. Whither shall we turn for salvation? This is the disconsolate, solemn plaint that is going up from a million bleeding hearts in all parts of the globe. It reaches even to our pampered dull ears from the blood drenched steppes of Russia and the pitiless marshes of the Tigris, from the holocaust trenches in sunny France and the icy wastes of the Balkan mountains. It rises like a moan from the ruins of devastated cities and like a dirge from all the seas, where noble and innocent lives lie frozen in watery graves. Belgium is enslaved, Armenia—Christian Armenia—is ravished and dishonored! The flower of the human race are arrayed in steel with murder in their hearts. O, Church of the Living Christ, wake up! How can these things be?

Christianity, or the thing that we called and believed to be Christianity before August 1, 1914, is on trial! And it is not only those whose hearts are torn that are putting it on trial. It's you—it's I—we, in this placid land of plenty—that are putting this faith on trial! Consciously or unconsciously, we too are asking in this hour of the world's calamity: "Whither shall we turn for salvation?" Rest assured, those agonizing souls across the several seas are seeking and finding a new and a profounder faith! Human life will henceforth have a different meaning for them. What will be *our* verdict? Will *we* be content with our spiritual status quo of August 1, 1914?

My thoughts will group themselves about four questions? 1. What is the present world situation? 2. What is the responsibility of the Christian Church for the present world situation? 3. What will the future world situation be? 4. What part will we play in the future world situation?

I. I was in London when the Austrian heir apparent Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his consort were assassinated at

Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. The event excited no special concern amongst the English people, nor did it rouse them to any special commiseration. General indifference characterized their attitude. They were absorbed with business and, at that season, with holiday preparations. No one thought of war, unless it was the foreign office, and they kept their own counsel. I attended church at St. Paul's the following Sunday and heard a sermon which I have long ago forgotten. Two weeks later I was in Paris. If the Parisians were dancing on a magazine of melinite, they seemed blissfully unconscious of it. To them the world was moving on its gay old way. M. Poincare was visiting the Tsar in St. Petersburg, and the Kaiser was cruising in the fjords of Norway. Who said war? Par exemple! The French provincial wasn't roused even a moment from his notorious apathy toward politics. The sun was shining in his wheat fields and his vines gave prospect of a large yield in the Fall. The Parisians, who ought to know, were still dancing and drinking—why should he worry?

It was late in July when I rejoined my family at Heidelberg. Scenting the danger, I went to the bank in which I kept a deposit and wrote a check for my balance. I said, "Pay me in gold." The sum was considerable, so the teller called the manager who sought to disuade me from withdrawing the money. I told him I feared war and a moratorium and I was leaving for home in a month anyway. "Nonsense, there'll be no war—it will all blow over. The business interests won't allow it." I wanted to be courteous, as they had always been kind to me, so I told him I would think it over till next day. When I was on the street again, I paused to listen to the talk of groups of people here and there. The tone wasn't reassuring, and when I heard a small coterie of laboring men (of all men!) denouncing the Kaiser for his deliberately withholding the order for a general mobilization when every day's delay cost them so much and helped the enemy correspondingly, I turned right back to the bank and unyieldingly demanded instant payment. Four days later was the fateful first of August. The *world* exploded!

What is the situation today? Thirteen nations, including seven of the eight Great Powers, are engaged in a struggle of annihilation. Destruction, death, deepest misery everywhere! The whole of Europe is in arms. The whole of Africa, except the tiny negro Republic of Liberia, is war area. The whole of Asia is seething and China is in a state of revolution bordering on anarchy. The war area extends even to our hemisphere and takes in portions of both Americas. The rest of our hemisphere is in a ferment and our own beloved country, the last hope of mankind, stands on the brink of war with a sister republic. And let us not in our supposed security delude ourselves that this new war will be confined to the original belligerents! The whole world is at the ignition point! Oh, the terror and woe of it all! And the pity of it, Oh, the pity of it, that in such a brief time the beautiful structure of international comity and co-operation which was rising in such majesty and splendor during the past two decades, has been dashed to pieces! And shall War's Iron Broom sweep out the very last fragments? Let me hasten to answer. No, a thousand times No! *Above all nations is humanity; above humanity is God!*

II. What is the responsibility of the Christian Church for this awful world cataclysm? Alas, a very heavy one! I am speaking of the whole Christian family and of no particular branch of it; and if I condemn anyone, I would mostly condemn myself.

The Christian Church for the past generation has been losing its power over the hearts of men. It has been losing its grip—let us be honest—*on you and me!* This is no new discovery. Acute observers have long known that the modern Church hasn't satisfied the wants of men. Men have abandoned her and are satisfying themselves with other things. Go into our largest cities and see the diminutive congregations! One Sunday a few months before the war I attended a service in the great cathedral of Cologne in the heart of Catholic Germany. The little group of worshippers and the great absent host were castigated by the priest for not coming to confessional in

one of the most pitiful and violent diatribes I ever heard from a pulpit. The spirit of the Psalmist who sang, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand," no longer meets with any hearty response. The world has preferred "to dwell in the tents of wickedness." One Sunday afternoon in Paris, I was crossing the Place St. Sulpice and observed the facade of the great cathedral of that name, the richest on the left bank of the Seine, gaily decorated. I entered and found high mass in progress with a pomp and ceremony I had never witnessed before. A whole college of priests, the altars aflame with a thousand candles, incense and perfume floating through the vaulted arches. And a chorus of voices such as I had never heard in Paris! The service was led by an archbishop, specially sent from Rome! A great, solemn occasion! I eagerly listened for a great spiritual appeal, for here the whole pomp and power of the Church was being put into play for some great purpose. The mountain labored, a mouse came forth. The archbishop had come to take up a collection for the repairs on the tower of the cathedral that had been begun and were left unfinished for more than two years! In the year 1914, there was more money spent on alcoholic liquors in the United States than was spent by the entire Christian Church in the world for all purposes of every kind whatsoever for the past one hundred years! "Is it not a comment on the hollowness of the Church's pretensions," is the bitter criticism of a recent writer, "that as civilization has advanced, the church has receded and that annually her remaining millions ooze away and are lost in secular affairs?—For nineteen centuries society has left in the hands of the Church the direction of the moral forces of the world. And now, after all these centuries, we find ourselves falling into the same moral vacuum into which the world empire of the Romans fell. After eighteen hundred years it is as easy for men to thrust bayonets into one another as it was in the heathen world."

Why has the Christian Church lost her vitality and her power? Let us answer in all charity toward others, but in severe judgment upon ourselves. 1. Because Christians, laity and

clergy, are contaminated with worldliness. We have made an altar of Baal of the altar of the Most High! 2. Because of inefficient spiritual leadership. We have too many small minds in the pulpit and too much molly-coddle, namby-pamby preaching. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." "The average clergyman fails to inspire his flock because he has nothing to give them out of the storehouse of his own personal experience." To quote the phrase of an English clergyman: "We are fed with the tritest platitudes." Is it any wonder we are anemic souls without deep spiritual convictions? 3. The Christian Churches, with wilful blindness, have denied the intellectual problems they could not solve and they have evaded the moral difficulties to which they had no answer. Thus the Christian conscience has been falsified, and men have *forced* their faith into accord with their knowledge or their knowledge into accord with their faith. With a consistent bigotry, the Catholic Church under the present Pope, has set itself against the hopeful movement in the Church to reconcile dogma with science, known as Modernism. During the past winter a great denominational State Convention met in Austin and with equal bigotry denounced as heretical a text-book on physical geography that makes only the most casual reference to the doctrine of evolution.

To generalize, we have been making a severance between *religion* and *life*, a severance for which the Churches are largely accountable. We have made Christianity a sect, a great, a noble sect—still a sect. It is merely one of the religions of the world, along with Buddhism, Shintoism, Islam and all the rest. We have refused to admit that all truth is related, be it in nature, in life, in science, in art, in the realm of the Seen or the Unseen; and we have set off to itself the thing we call Religion. This saintliest of the Muses shall have no communion with her worldly sisters! This severance between Religion and Life has to be healed, and the remedy lies in perfect honesty on both sides. "We shall then be able step by step to bring our human aims and needs into accord with our spiritual ideals—but only in so far as we are permitted to recognize a contradiction where

we find it, and to accept any occasional discords as the transitional chords (never to be lingered upon) that go to the making of an eternal harmony."

4. The war has revealed a fourth weakness. The Christian Church is too deistic and too little Christian! The numerous bombastic imperial proclamations, issued by the Tsars, the Emperors, the Kings, in the course of this war illustrate what I mean. They are full of the use—or misuse—of the name of God, but the name of the *Son* is conspicuous by its absence in all of them. As has been said, "The Christianity of these professedly Christian nations has become a sort of Deism with an unrevealed God expressing the national aspirations or the views of the ruling powers. God alone may be whatever we choose to make Him; but not so God as revealed in Christ Jesus!"

Friends, you know the teachings of the Prince of Peace. I charge that the Christian Church has taught too little in the spirit of Christ. It has feebly succumbed to the fear of offending worldly powers. It has stifled its voice and its conscience when it should have *mightily resisted* the spirit of the age, its commercialism, its militarism, its social injustices, its lust for blood and conquest! This awful war did not originate in a country nor on a continent we Christians are pleased to call heathen! Let us sit in sack-cloth and ashes and wait humbly before the Lord! Let the fires that are now purging the nations also purge the Christian Church. Let her search for *Truth,* pure and undefiled! Let more consecrated men and women *of great ability* enter the ministry! Let the Church abandon its literalism and its empty ecclesiasticism! Let her be *filled* with the One whose optimism was unshaken by disaster! Let the Christian Church henceforth know only Christ and Him crucified!

We all commit the fundamental error against which Tolstoi warned us when he said: "We constantly think there are circumstances in which a human being can be treated without affection. *There are no such circumstances!*"

III. What will the future world situation be? It will be a very different world. It will be a world of *twice-born men!* It will be a different and a better world.

Political, social, and economic disintegration are now taking place in Europe on a scale inconceivable to us here, and perhaps even to them. And when the twenty million men return home from the trenches there will be a *reintegration* of society and of state on an entirely different basis. The Christian Church, too, must be reconstructed or it will perish! The majority of these twenty million men are of the laboring class. They have been trained to take from the enemy by violence what could not be obtained by argument or reason ,and they have seen violence succeed! And what of the millions of women, emancipated by this horrible cataclysm, who have tasted liberty, who have taken their places as independent economic factors in the commercial and industrial world, while the men were away at the front? Are they going tamely back to their former life of subserviency and helplessness. These problems of the future are too big to be treated here this morning. But it is certain the old order of things is going—has gone. The guns that battered down the forts at Liege in August, 1914, demolished more than cement and steel—the *old social order* collapsed at the same time.

War compels men to face the ultimate realities of existence. "Ah!," I was told by some French prisoners with whom I talked in Heidelberg, "out there (meaning the battle-field) it makes one think!" That's it, thinking! These twenty million are thinking as never men thought! Only eternal verities interest them. Shams deceive them no longer. The intellectual and spiritual changes of a generation are being compressed into two years. They are living with an intensity we here in Lotusland have no conception of. The thin veneer of civilization was torn off early. Those men are living and acting on their *primal instincts.* In the convulsion that has taken place in their souls everything unnatural, artificial, has been swept away. *Has faith in Jesus Christ gone too?* Heine prophesied the revival of

the pagan faith of the Germanic aborigines: "The day will come," said he, "when the old stone Gods will arise from the silent ruins and rub the dust of a thousand years from their eyes. Thor with his giant hammer will at last spring up and shatter to bits the Gothic cathedrals." Did not the iconoclasm of the French Revolution banish the Christian Church from France and set up the worship of Reason? Who will dare to fathom the depths of the spiritual regeneration now taking place in Europe and Asia?

When peace finally comes to these nations in their external relations, there will follow grave internal disturbances over a period of years. Poverty, hard poverty, will afflict them. The public debt of France now exceeds ten billion dollars and is rapidly increasing. Germany and Austria owe nearly as much. Russia is hopelessly insolvent. England is spending one billion dollars every month of the war. The taxation to pay the interest on this debt and to keep the governments going will crush the people. But with poverty will come the virtues of poverty, simpler pleasures, more self-denial, more unselfishness in social and home life. More seriousness will characterize society and men will learn that money can buy pleasure but it cannot buy happiness. Family ties will be stronger. For a world of sham and self-indulgence, we shall see a world of industry and self-sacrifice. The simple faith of the fathers will be renewed in its pristine beauty and power. The triumph of patriotism over selfishness on the battlefield will continue in the halls of legislation and the courts of justice. And the universal mourning for the untimely dead will mellow the hearts of men in all the afflicted nations, and will awaken, let us hope, a new sympathy and a new sense of human brotherhood. Yes, the pre-war world and the post-war world will be essentially different! Just now, "the Time is out of joint," but we shall all yet see the glory of the Lord.

IV. You have often heard it said this country is to be the conservator of civilization from the great cataclysm. The thought flatters and pleases us. Friends, let us not lull our-

selves into inaction with any such vain delusion! It is *belieing Nature and Providence* to believe that the agony and sacrifice of the Old World will be fruitless of great human good. We, in the United States, shall henceforth be the representatives and the type of a *cast off social order!* Must we, too, go through the same dreadful furnace of death and destruction to purge us of the old dross? Shall we match their reformed governments, efficient, democratized, freed of corruption, seeking only the common weal, with our old machinery of state that creaks at every joint, with its lynchings, its inefficient administration of justice, its swollen fortunes, its social iniquities, its selfish and corrupt demagogy? For *their* Christian Church, sanctified by many tribulations, the active friend of mankind and seeking not its own, shall we present *ours* still arrayed in purple—unserious, self-satisfied, ease-loving, and clinging to its idols of creed and tradition? Brethren, we must act, we must act quickly. Strike to the right and left! We can hardly hit amiss. Then amid the debris let us fall to our knees and dedicate ourselves more unselfishly to the service of others and more consecratedly to the will of the risen Savior. For "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

It is not fair to say that, in view of this great calamity that has befallen the World, Christianity has failed. Christianity cannot be blamed for failure, *because it has never been tried.* Had there been any big body of Christians in the belligerent countries, this war would have been impossible. But, praise God, in Europe things will be different—*Will they be different here?*

I appeal to you as educated men and women, above all to those of you who have been leaders in scholarship here in this great institution of learning, to give some thought to the momentous religious and social problems of our time. In a colorless age of frivolity and superficiality, I would give you as a watchword the one Lord Chesterfield in a similar age suggested to his son, the one word, "Approfondissez!" Go to the bottom of things! We are drifting. In religion we have almost become lacka-

daisical. As individuals we are failing to get the most out of life because of a general attitude of moral complacency and intellectual torpidity. God rouse us! Last week I received a letter from a young French cannonier, written at the front amid the thunder of a thousand guns and the shrieks of the lacerated and the groans of the dying. "Ah!," he writes, "if I ever escape this hecatomb, how I shall know the meaning of living! I used not to think that there was any special joy in breathing, in opening one's eyes to the sun and receiving its light. I believed there were only certain hours that had any particular value or were worth remembering. I let the rest slip by. If I see the end of this war, I shall know how to seize upon them all, how to enjoy all the passing *seconds* of life, like delicious and refreshing waters that one feels gliding through one's fingers. It seems to me that I shall stop every hour to cry out, "I live, I live, I live!" Something of this young French hero's earnestness and intensity of conviction is what I plead for in all of us. Since he wrote, a shell may have carried him away and he may have learned his lesson too late. If he survives, he will in time be one of the great men of the nation. Must we learn the lesson he has learned only by paying the same terrible price? It is not necessary. It depends on us. Goethe tells us that at thirty he resolved "to work out life no longer by halves, but in all its beauty and totality"—

"Im Ganzen, Guten, Schoenen
Resolut zu leben."

And so may we do, ever remembering that

"We live in deeds, not years,
In feelings, not in figures on a dial,
In thoughts, not breaths;
We should count time by heart throbs!
He most lives who thinks most,
Who feels the noblest and acts the best."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 021 547 568 2

Morgan—Austin

B88

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 021 547 568 2

Hollinger Corp.